



## Venezuelans and Arubans observe July 5, Venezuelan Independence Day

The Center Bolivariana, located behind the Talk of the Town Resort was the site of festivities hosted by Andreina Moreno, General Consul of Venezuela in Aruba. Ms. Moreno welcomed several island dignitaries, including Governor Fredis Refunjol and Prime Minister Nelson Oduber to the opening ceremonies on Thursday morning, along with Minister of Finance, Nilo Swaen, Minister of Culture, Labor and Sport, Ramon Lee and the President of the Parliament, Mervyn Wyatt-Ras, and other members of Parliament.

The morning ceremonies began in the shadow of the impressive stature of Latin America's great liberator, Simon Bolivar. The Consul formerly greeted the gathering with a recounting of the history of the independence of Venezuela, and the continued efforts of the country to maintain their freedom and live in equality. Simón Bolívar, born in Caracas on July 24<sup>th</sup> of 1783, was of Basque descent and a member of the local aristocracy. His father died when Simon was three, and his mother nine years later. Raised by relatives, he formed a deep friendship with Don Simon Rodriguez, a teacher and proponent of social reform, which would have a profound influence on Bolivar's life. Don Andrés Bello, whose teachings would also contribute to Bolivar's developing humanist philosophy, also tutored him in his youth.

Simon Bolívar established himself in Europe after a one-year marriage at sixteen that ended with the death of his wife due to illness. He fervently pursued his studies and an active social life in Paris, but was reunited with his old friend and tutor Don Simon during that time. While on a trip together to Rome, the young Bolivar swore an oath "that he would not allow his arm to rest nor his soul to die until he had realized his dream of liberating the South American world from Spanish dominion."

The war for the emancipation of Venezuela was fought from 1811 until 1823, with a civil war following between those wanting independence and royalists faithful to Spain. July 5 is the anniversary of the declaration of independence in 1811, making it the first South American nation to declare independence from Spain. Finally, independence was officially achieved in 1830 after many bloody battles and great sacrifice. Simon Bolivar is also considered the liberator of Colombia, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and founded Bolivia. On December 10, 1830, in Cartagena, Colombia, Bolivar he made his last public proclamation, which is considered his political testament. Death caught him by surprise one week later, after a life devoted to achieving freedom for his compatriots. His mortal remains, brought to Venezuela with great pomp in 1942, now lie in the National Pantheon in Caracas.

Wednesday's official celebration included the placing of memorial wreaths by several groups at the base of the statue of Simon Bolivar. Prime Minister Oduber placed a wreath on behalf of the Aruban people, and Consul Moreno represented her homeland. Additional wreaths were placed by the Instituto Venezolano for Culture and Cooperation, the General Consul of Colombia, Ricardo Emilio Cifuentes Ordonez, on behalf of his country, Comunidad Bolivariana, and the Grupo Catolico Latino.

Renowned Venezuelan performer Yuribel Alemain performed on the regional instrument called a cuatro and sang traditional songs that are close to the hearts of Venezuelans. Many Venezuelan expatriates that have made Aruba their home were in the audience, and she invited them to join her, which they did. It was a touching moment as they waved their flags and remembered their homeland with song.

The morning ended with a festive buffet of traditional Venezuelan cuisine, and the cutting of a beautiful cake bearing the aspect of Simon Bolivar by Consul Moreno. Many stayed to enjoy the delightful dishes that graced the table and enjoy regional music, both expatriates and their Aruban compatriots who joined them in the celebration of the independence day of their homeland.